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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF AND APPLES, HONDURAS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage July 9 on the Ma Ying-jeou administration's efforts to fight corruption; on the legal cases involving former President Chen Shui-bian and his family; and on developments in cross-Straits relations. Several newspapers reported on remarks by Taiwan's Minister of Health Yeh Ching-chuan Wednesday that Taiwan would soon ease restrictions on U.S. beef imports. The pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, ran a banner headline on page twelve, reading "Six Batches Found with Pesticides, Consumers' Foundation Urges Boycott of U.S. Poisoned Apples."

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed the Taiwan government's recent decision to lift the ban on endosulfan residue on imported apples and its plan to fully open Taiwan's market to U.S. beef. The article said these decisions were made under pressure from the U.S. government. With regard to Honduras, a column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" speculated on how the United States will mediate between ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya and the interim leaders of Honduras so as to meet the United States' national interests in Latin America. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said despite certain unconstitutional moves by Zelaya, staging a coup to get rid of a democratically elected leader is still against the law and thus unacceptable. End summary.

13. U.S. Beef and Apples

"The Taste of Poisoned Apples"

Lee Wu-chung, an agricultural economist, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (7/9):

"In the face of the various and never-ending food safety problems, every country in the world is working hard to strengthen quality control of their imports of food products. The U.S. government, in particular, has recently published new regulations on food safety in an attempt to enhance its food safety control. The Department of Health (DOH) under Taiwan's Executive Yuan, however, ran counter to what other countries are doing by lifting the ban on the use of Endosulfan, a pesticide found in imports of [U.S.] apples, from the standard of 'non-detectable' to 0.5 ppm. Local scholars and experts strongly questioned whether such a move was aimed at helping to get poisoned U.S. apples off the hook. ...

"... But according to newspaper reports, a senior official at the Council of Agriculture's (COA) Agricultural Chemicals and Toxic Substances Research Institute said the new residue standard was revised following several negotiations between Taiwan and the United States in March. In particular, COA's statistics showed that apples produced in Taiwan account for approximately 4 percent of the market share in Taiwan, while 96 percent of apples are imported, among which U.S. apples constitute the bulk, accounting for 35.35 percent of total apple imports. [Given such data,] the public will surely come to a conclusion as to what the real reason is behind [the government's decision to] ease the residue standard this time. ...

"... Let's also take a look at the likelihood for the [Taiwan] government, despite the lingering fear of mad cow disease, to agree to open its market to U.S. bone-in beef in the face of U.S. government pressure. One cannot help but ask: Is Taiwan really an independent sovereign state? Has it really walked out of the colonial era where it was ruled by a foreign power? In addition to the United States, are we also eating the poisoned apples of economics fed by China?! ..."

4. Honduras

A) "The Face and Substance of the Mediation in the Honduran Coup"

The "International Lookout" column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] wrote (7/9):

"... The U.S. interests lie in Honduras' sticking to its cooperation with the United States and not echoing the leftists in [Latin] America. The Honduran government only needs to abide by this principle and the United States will not care who the Honduran President is, as long as he is not anti-U.S. As a result, the United States will definitely step in and 'mediate' [in the Honduran coup]. ... In other words, [the United States will seek to have Honduran President Manuel] Zelaya serve as a puppet-President, then let the group which staged the coup hold an election, and make sure that a pro-U.S. president is elected. Such an outcome will be the same as that of the coup, even though it is better-looking than a 'hard coup.' The Organization of American States will win face, so will Zelaya. The United States and the group which staged the coup will win the substance."

B) Manuel Zelaya: Not Exactly Mr. Democracy"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (7/9):

"The United States and Venezuela almost never agree. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez does seem to have a soft spot for new U.S. President Barack Obama, but despite his personal leanings, he still rails against the 'imperialist' gringos and claims Obama is a 'tool of the system.' But both Obama and Chavez have become strange bedfellows by joining together in calling for the return of ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya. These two American leaders are supported by the European Union and pretty much every other nation on earth in calling the coup that removed Zelaya from office 'illegal' and 'unacceptable.' To many observers around the world, this story seems like a simple case of good versus evil. A democratically elected president is good, while a coup is bad, right? Most things, however, are never quite so simple and this particular case is even more complex than most. ...

"Many nations around the world are now faced with a dilemma. Many may not view Zelaya as a champion of democracy, but he was elected, even if by a small margin and coups are universally derided as unacceptable. But even the despot Adolf Hitler initially used a form of democracy to come to power before distorting and corrupting it into the one of the worst dictatorships the planet has ever seen. No doubt some in Honduras felt that they simply couldn't wait or take a chance that Zelaya could either remain in office or install a puppet proxy. ... The coup was a hasty move that ultimately may prove futile. Democratic nations around the world have no choice but to swallow their misgivings and call for the unequivocal return of Zelaya, even if it leaves a bad taste in their mouths. ..."

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